

# Lazy days on the Lahn

**Explore medieval villages on this scenic waterway by boat or bike**

**Story and photos by  
Karl Weisel**  
*U.S. Army Garrison Hessen  
Public Affairs Office*

There's nothing quite like paddling quietly past cormorants and swans on a lazy afternoon on the Lahn River. As medieval villages come into view and slide slowly past, conversations stretch between canoes like the string connecting two paper cups of a child's homemade walkie-talkie.

The locals have long known about the charms of the Lahn River which starts as a trickle northwest of Marburg before welcoming tributary streams and winding its way down past the university towns of Marburg and Giessen, on to Wetzlar and Weilburg, Limburg, Diez, Bad Ems and eventually flowing into the Rhein River near Koblenz at Lahnstein.

At medieval towns and villages all along the course of the Lahn, one finds boat rental facilities, restaurants with gardens overlooking the river and bike paths that follow the course of the sinuous waterway. Visitors will also find plenty of campgrounds along the river. A train also connects the many smaller



Canoers don their personal flotation devices and get ready to set out on the Lahn River after a lunch break at one of the many villages set along the meandering waterway.

villages giving bikers, hikers and boaters another option for travel along the waterway.

As kayakers and other paddlers make their way down the river they must navigate through various locks every several kilometers. Some are electronic and run by the river authorities while smaller locks require assistance from the boaters who must climb up to crank open the vents allowing water to flow in to the appropriate level for safe passage.

All along the way bikers and boaters can stop to explore castles, churches and monasteries set overlooking the Lahn River. In the town of Runkel, east of Limburg and west of Weilburg, one will encounter a fortification from the early Middle Ages, the Runkel Castle. Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, the massive fortress is said to have been founded by one of Charlemagne's knights in 778. Over the centuries it was expanded, destroyed, built upon and served as protection for a crossing over the Lahn River.

"If people want to rent ca-

Runkel is only one of many picturesque towns, full of narrow streets with half-timbered houses, ice cream cafes and stunning churches that line the Lahn. Hiking trails lead up and away from the river offering visits to other historical sites and buildings. When passing the town of Weilburg by boat one must paddle through a long tunnel built especially for boats in the 19th century.

Canoe and kayak rental facilities on the Lahn provide boats, personal flotation devices and containers for keeping backpacks, food supplies and clothes dry. Various outfitters offer this service and can be found online by searching for the Lahn, boat tours on the Lahn or Lahn Kanu (canoe) or something similar.

Outdoor Recreation centers in Giessen, Wiesbaden, Hanau and Baumholder can supply canoes, paddles, personal flotation devices, bikes, camping gear and advice needed to explore nearby rivers.

"We offer canoe and kayak trips on the Lahn, Main, Rhein, Mosel and Nahe Rivers," said Joseph Harris III, director of U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden Outdoor Recreation.

The Wiesbaden Dexheim Outdoor Recreation Centers also offer whitewater rafting trips.

"If people want to rent ca-

noes, we charge \$15 per canoe including one paddle and one life jacket per seat. Customers are responsible for all the car tie-down materials," Harris said, adding that customers are welcome to call or stop by Outdoor Recreation for information and advice on exploring rivers in the area by bike or boat.

Wiesbaden Outdoor Recreation is located in Building 1046 on Wiesbaden Army Airfield. Dexheim Outdoor Recreation is located in Building 6320 on Anderson Barracks. Call mil 337-5760 for Wiesbaden or mil 334-5818 for Dexheim's Outdoor Rec.

In addition to offering various outdoor gear for rent ranging from tents, stoves, roller blades and fest tables to canoes (for certified paddlers only), Giessen's Outdoor Recreation Center also features a small area behind the center where people can camp, according to Andre Herren, assistant director of Giessen's Outdoor Rec.

The center is located in Building 58 on the Giessen Depot. Call mil 343-8207 for more information. Hanau's Outdoor Recreation is located in Building 459 on Old Argonner Kaserne. Call mil 322-8891.

Baumholder's Outdoor Rec is in Building 8167 on Smith Barracks. Call mil 485-7182 for assistance and information.



John Cuenin of Heidelberg's Troop 26 and fellow Scouts build a fire during a training session at Camp Freedom July 18.

## Good times at Camp Freedom

**Boy Scouts learn leadership while having fun and adventures**

**Story and photos by  
Karl Weisel**  
*U.S. Army Garrison Hessen  
Public Affairs Office*

Hundreds of boys throughout Europe are converging on a wooded area about an hour north of Giessen this summer to explore "The Final Frontier."

U.S. Army Garrison Hessen Boy Scouts are among the more than 700 youths spending a week at a time at Camp Freedom to earn merit badges, learn about conservation and to enjoy everything from aquatics to archery, Scout crafts to rocket science.

"We're going to see about 750 Scouts this season," said Karen Meier, Camp Freedom director, explaining that while there will be fewer Scouts attending this year than in past years due to downsizing of U.S. Forces in Europe, the intent remains the same — to help foster character, citizenship and fitness among the youths.

"There's magic here that happens," said Meier, describing the



many opportunities for learning, sharing experiences and growth as teams and individuals. "You see the synergy happening. They truly go away with a wonderful experience and I hope they go away more grown up."

This year Camp Freedom's theme, "The Final Frontier," mirrors the space exploration drive in that Boy Scouts must be dedicated and use teamwork to achieve their goals, Meier said. A rocket launch opened the week.

"This gives these boys an outdoor experience," said Carl Mueller, a retired warrant officer who served two tours in Vietnam and is concluding his tenure as camp ranger after 25 years of sup-



Youths and leaders enjoy a game of Kubb, a new feature at Camp Freedom. Photo left: Chris Dunn (left), archery range master, helps Scouts master the bow and arrow.

porting Scouting in Europe. "This gives them something to do in the summer and also helps build some character and different styles of leadership.

"But the main thing is, they're here to have fun," said Mueller. "It gets them outdoors, away from the Xbox and gives them a chance to meet their peers from different countries and cultures. It also gives them a chance to learn such things as lifesaving skills and to earn lifeguard certification."

"We're having a great time," said Sgt. Shane Tracy, scoutmaster for Hanau's Troop 49 and assigned to the Hanau Health Clinic. "All of the Scouts are working together like a family.

"It really is like a family atmosphere. ... The boys have the opportunity to come out here and learn things such as how to camp," he said, adding that earning merit badges and the experiences shared are the highlights of the week-long camp. "It's proving to be a positive experience."

"I'm working on my swimming merit badge," said Hanau Scout Sean Boyle of Troop 49. "The pool is outstanding."

The 12-year-old described the Scouting experience as "fun. It gives you a lot of opportunities to do things, make new friends and help out the community."

Boyle was involved in a recy-



Aron Holewinski, camp commissioner, conducts a camp leader meeting at Camp Freedom.

cling project in Hanau last year as part of a fellow Scout's Eagle project.

"Scouting helps teach kids how to behave, to do service projects and to be kind," said Troop 49 patrol leader Daniel Brooking, age 14. "I'd recommend Scouting to other boys."

Brooking, who was enjoying his second year at Camp Freedom, said he particularly appreciated the chance to be out in the country to "enjoy the view" and to play Kubb, a team skills building game introduced by Jeremy Woods, program director, at this year's camp.

With many families separated by deployments, Camp Freedom also provides a welcome respite from daily life, said Becky Aldridge, camp business manager.

"We're sensitive to Scouts who have a parent downrange," she said, explaining that most of the camp staff and leaders have military experience and discuss warning signs they should be aware of among the Scouts during their training before the camp opens. "Most of these guys are military and have been exposed to what this entails."

Providing a nurturing environment where the boys can safely explore new experiences, share emotions and grow as individuals are vital parts of the camp experience, she said.



Members of Hanau's Troop 49 enjoy lunch at Camp Freedom.

Conservation is another important part of the camp experience, said Meier, explaining that the Boy Scouts of America stress conservation. "We choose a project on an annual basis."

Adult volunteers are crucial to the Scouting experience, Meier added. While the goal is to turn boys into leaders, "you need the adult leadership for coaching and mentoring. We want any adults who have a passion for youth, who believe in the Boy Scout legacy. What could be more empowering than leaving a legacy ... of good values.

"Baden-Powell (the father of the Boy Scout movement) had a great phrase," said Meier, "It's fun with a purpose. Hopefully these Scouts leave the camp with that legacy," she said.